

RT Hon Boris Johnson MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London, SW1A 2AA

Start Network  
Aviation House, 125 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6NH

19 August 2020

**Re: Building a more effective humanitarian aid system**

Dear Prime Minister,

On World Humanitarian Day, as we honour aid and health workers around the world who continue to fight relentlessly during the COVID-19 pandemic, we ask you to be our partner on building a more effective humanitarian system.

We are Start Network, a membership of 52 civil society organisations based in the UK and in more than 100 countries, working to deliver humanitarian aid worldwide. Our vision is for a more effective aid system that prioritises the lives and aspirations of people most in need.

For the past decade, the UK Government has been a co-creator and vital partner for Start Network and its ambition. We are fully committed to working with the UK Government to ensure that the merger of the Department of International Development (DfID) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) reinforces the UK's position as a respected source of technical expertise, policy leadership, learning and innovation and political championship of humanitarian action.

As a UK-based organisation, we align ourselves with the [key international development priorities](#) articulated by the Bond Group. As a global network, we represent a wider constituency of diverse international, national and local organisations that have benefitted from UK leadership and UK aid. In that regard, we put forward additional points that we urge you to consider as priorities of the new department:

- **Prioritise funding and financing for early and rapid humanitarian action.** Over 90% of humanitarian funding is allocated to emergency response, despite the fact that 55% of crises are predictable and despite growing evidence that early, preventative action is more efficient and effective. Our UK-funded global Start Fund and risk-based financing mechanisms have demonstrated that early and rapid action can mitigate the effects of humanitarian hazards and save lives. We urge the FCDO to invest further in these initiatives to deliver greater effectiveness and value for money on UK aid projects.
- **Preserve humanitarian budget lines.** As it moves forward on departmental and financial restructuring, we urge the UK Government to preserve and prioritise humanitarian budget lines. Diverting the humanitarian budgets to other initiatives risks the UK's vital contributions to programmes that have helped assist and protect millions of people in crisis contexts.
- **Invest in locally-led humanitarian action to ensure that local people have the agency and resources to respond to the crises they face.** Start Fund Bangladesh, a DfID-supported financing mechanism, is demonstrating that by funding local, frontline organisations directly, we can reduce response time by 40% and lower operational costs by 15%. We urge the FCDO to further invest in supporting locally-led aid for more effective and efficient UK aid projects.
- **Drive community-level innovation to improve and modernise the global aid system.** Innovation, improvement and learning is a programmatic necessity if humanitarian action is to remain relevant and effective in today's crises. Through the DfID-funded DEPP Innovation Labs, Start Network

supported local-level innovation to strengthen disaster preparedness. We urge the FCDO to invest further in locally generated innovations, as local communities are best placed to solve the problems they face.

- **Uphold humanitarian principles and inclusive approaches as core tenets of aid delivery.** The UK is, and must remain, a global leader in the promotion of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence in the delivery of humanitarian aid, and an advocate of Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS). In addition, DfID has made outstanding contributions to its commitment to 'leave no one behind' and should continue to prioritise the inclusion of vulnerable and marginalised people and groups as a core tenet of its aid delivery.
- **Ensure independent scrutiny, transparency and accountability of aid spending.** The success of the FCDO will depend on its accountability to both aid beneficiaries and UK taxpayers. This requires the representation of humanitarian aid at National Security and Cabinet level to guarantee that UK humanitarian endeavours remain a priority within Government. This also requires independent and transparent oversight of all ODA spending to ensure that funds are spent effectively. We call for the preservation of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) and an independent ODA parliamentary committee to scrutinise aid spend across all government departments.

We firmly believe that the effectiveness of humanitarian action lies in the positive collaboration between government and the wider civil society. We hope that our views are taken on board and that open, transparent and fruitful cooperation between the UK Government and civil society will be reinforced in the work of FCDO.

For much of the past half century, the UK has helped to create the rules and standards that underpin the formal humanitarian system. As the world's third largest humanitarian donor, the UK should continue to play a lead role in supporting and improving humanitarian action at a time when the world needs it most. We remain vigilant and hopeful that this merger will strengthen and reinforce the UK's commitments to effective, principled and accountable humanitarian action.

Yours sincerely,



Age International and HelpAge International, represent one member of Start Network

# START NETWORK

Marie-Pierre Caley, CEO, ACTED  
Jean-Michel Grand, Executive Director, Action Against Hunger  
Girish Menon, Chief Executive, ActionAid UK  
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Samar Muhareb, CEO, Arab Renaissance for Democracy & Development (ARDD)  
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Benjamin Laniado, CEO, CADENA International  
Christine Allen, Director, CAFOD  
Laurie Lee, CEO, Care International UK  
Mr Francis Atul Sarker, Executive Director, Caritas Bangladesh  
Fr. Poly Varghese, Executive Director, CARITAS INDIA  
Rev. Fr. Mahendra Gunatilleke, National Director, Caritas Sri Lanka-SEDEC  
p.p. Bob Ruxton (Danny Harvey, Executive Director, Concern Worldwide UK)  
Kees Zevenbergen, CEO, Stichting Cordaid  
Ellen Waters, Director of Development, Doctors of the World UK  
Leo Visser, CEO, Dorcas Aid International  
Dr Shaikh Tanveer Ahmed, Chief Executive, Health And Nutrition Development Society- HANDS  
Jamshaid Farid Soomro, President, HELP Foundation Pakistan  
Justin Derbyshire, Chief Executive Officer, HelpAge International  
Aleema Shivji, Executive Director, Humanity & Inclusion UK (HI UK)  
Ognjen Radosavljevic, Managing Director, International Medical Corps UK  
Naser Haghamed, Chief Executive Officer, Islamic Relief Worldwide  
Alexandra Angulo, Interim Executive Director, Mercy Corps  
Me kalimira Isidore, Coordonateur, MIDEFEHOPS asbl/RDC  
Kashif Shabir, Interim CEO, Muslim Aid  
Tirtha Prasad Saikia, Joint Director, North-East Affected Area Development Society (NEADS)  
Mr. Monjed Abu Jaish, General Manager, Agricultural Development Association – PARC  
Rose Caldwell, CEO, Plan International UK  
Maria Rudecinda Orellana, Directora Ejecutiva, PRO-VIDA Asociación Salvadoreña de Ayuda Humanitaria  
Nancy E. Wilson, Chief Executive Officer, Relief International UK  
Kevin Watkins, CEO, Save the Children UK  
Christina Bennett, CEO, Start Network  
Dr.Manu Gupta, Co-founder, Sustainable Environment and Ecological Development Society  
Alexandre Giraud, Director General, SOLIDARITÉS INTERNATIONAL  
Nigel Harris, CEO, Tearfund  
Caoimhe De Barra, Chief Executive Officer, Trócaire  
Mathias Mogge, Secretary General/CEO, Deutsche Welthungerhilfe e.V.  
Paul Anticoni, Chief Executive, World Jewish Relief  
Mark Sheard, Chief Executive Officer, World Vision UK  
Sanjay Pandey, Executive Director, Yuganter



Copied to:

Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Sir Philip Barton, Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Mr Nic Hailey, Director General, Transformation Team of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Mr Ben Mellor, Director, Transformation Team of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

**START NETWORK**

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